

Message

From: Elizabeth Erwin [Erwin.ElizabethLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]
Sent: 7/6/2011 6:39:40 PM
To: Kadry, Abdel-Razak [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=acb325507bf7451b9735813cfde5e417-Kadry, Abdel-Razak]; Sasso, Alan [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=8cb867519abc4dcea88149d12ef3e8e9-Sasso, Alan]; Davis, Allen [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=a8ecee8c29c54092b969e9547ea72596-Davis, Allen]; Boone, Amanda [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=304ccd01957044a1bd50a366d1cd76d4-Boone, Amanda]; Persad, Amanda [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=fd13fdf1bd814755baac109c2ab990a0-Persad, Amanda]; AmandaM Evans [Evans.AmandaMLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Hotchkiss, Andrew [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=10f01ccc8611401bb34d16b71a87d3d5-Hotchkiss, Andrew]; Kraft, Andrew [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=4a94a4f199b247778abb02285a51b927-Kraft, Andrew]; Anne Grambsch [Grambsch.AnneLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Gatchett, Annette [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=f12d699a71f84e21bddbb876dae7f96c-Gatchett, Annette]; Luke, April [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=b98bf69c14b142d3ac8e0e9132ee36ed-Luke, April]; CN=Audrey Hoffer/OU=DC/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Buckley, Barbara [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=4bb6dedc12624295b9e8e5f835a1f166-Buckley, Barbara]; Glenn, Barbara [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=7a2dc9210d2d4d02a623b33f87f49436-Glenn, Barbara]; Barbara Wright [Wright.BarbaraLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Clark, Becki [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=a906e07f1cd143b9a3c2ddab813b8140-Clark, Becki]; Hawkins, Belinda [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=075561d171e845828ec67a945663a8e6-Hawkins, Belinda]; Zwyer, Bette [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=79830e38edb14034b7e47e29ed213dab-Zwyer, Bette]; Bob Frederick [Frederick.BobLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Bob Sonawane [Sonawane.BobLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Brenda Carmichael [Carmichael.BrendaLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Gibbons, Catherine [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=2ac775a35a0945718edc7e02f50e6c12-Gibbons, Catherine]; Charles Ris [Ris.CharlesLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; CN=Chon Shoaf/OU=RTP/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Cubbison, Christopher [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=e1b702ba5f394a15a49c5efad199035a-Cubbison, Christopher]; Parsons, Christy [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=bf0dabe0c058478294128cb3f842573d-Powers, Christina]; Cai, Christine [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=8e5901665d14498983704fd9eeda0dd8-Cai, Christine]; Christine Ross [Ross.ChristineLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Christopher Sheth [Sheth.ChristopherLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Petersen, Dan [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=05e14a620a164436adfae701533b4cd5-Petersen, Dan]; Moore, Danielle [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=979ea3cb9c2f4da4ac701d93cb24c17d-Moore, Danielle]; Winner, Darrell [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=860556f5cd0f4855839907bcc90b2c41-Winner, Darrell]; Bussard, David [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=cf26b876393e44f38bdd06db02dbbfe5-Bussard, David]; Segal, Deborah [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=bccd984267644f3fb89ea65f65e6f422-Segal, Deborah]; Debra Walsh [Walsh.DebraLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Hutchins, Debra [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=38b89ba9317a475ca671ae9fe840e00d-Jones, DebraL]; Shaw, Denice [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=556182b3879649039b11d36e5e09d9aa-Shaw, Denice]; CN=Doug

Johns/OU=RTP/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Corona, Elizabeth [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=18d86fb8269b4557b5d06622b3a941af-Corona, Elizabeth]; Elizabeth Erwin [Erwin.ElizabethLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Eva McLanahan [McLanahan.EvaLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Lehmann, Geniece [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=949a2f9c9f9f484581c3d00b118193e6-Lehmann, Geniece]; Perovich, Gina [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=6e3c19d7f4db41bfa2477aa27ad83945-Perovich, Gina]; Suter, Glenn [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=86ff3a58b76b40e4a75d9441bd584153-Suter, Glenn]; Harlal Choudhury [choudhury.harlalLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; CN=Helen Knecht/OU=CI/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Hui-Min Yang [Yang.Hui-MinLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Ila Cote [Cote.IlaLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Avery, James [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=b0fc9e70467647709fa9377dfb987f10-Avery, James]; James Ball [Ball.JamesLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Strong, Jamie [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=ea753aafefb74c268550fe6a2c187838-Benedict, Jamie]; Gamble, Janet [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=9f345a4a1e5e45fdbb51817c8d129f95-Gamble, Janet]; Frithsen, Jeff [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=e3743bd6f3c345baae407c1d6f78e92-FRITHSEN, JEFF]; Jennifer Jinot [Jinot.JenniferLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; CN=JMichael Davis/OU=RTP/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Vandenberg, John [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=dcae2b98a04540fb8d099f9d4dead690-Vandenberg, John]; Kaiser, Jonathan [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=d8d90ca09c2744f080d333034ee08fe7-Kaiser, Jonathan]; Karen Hammerstrom [Hammerstrom.KarenLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Kate Guyton [Guyton.KatelLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Deener, Kathleen [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=b9a2ff1c086249ea8f6414afde8a5e54-Deener, Kathleen]; Newhouse, Kathleen [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=5f019c8179304045acd61bc05b571fb0-Newhouse, Kathleen]; Raffaele, Kathleen [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=cc48281bbab34bf5bf3ab1a63780d5ca-Kathleen Raffaele]; Kelly Serfling [Serfling.KellyLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Krista Christensen [Christensen.KristaLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Alexander, Laurie [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=1b0c420c5c71464b922e50788a1c22de-Alexander, Laurie]; Kopylev, Leonid [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=abfe6798809e4c8c8a27452ec86726d8-Kopylev, Leonid]; Lisa Vinikoor-Imler [Vinikoor-Imler.LisaLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Lucy Curtis [Curtis.LucyLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Flowers, Lynn [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=1a4411c874d041b9a8badfc32b91bd70-Flowers, Lynn]; CN=Madalene Stevens/OU=DC/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Field, Malcolm [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=8d12938447d14c7babcf431d75d745f6-Field, Malcolm]; Pratt, Margaret [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=8eda90b62a874c7ea9d857903ac1fd14-Pratt, Margaret]; Maria Spassova [Spassova.Maria@epa.gov]; Marian Rutigliano [Rutigliano.MarianLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Martin Gehlhaus [Gehlhaus.MartinLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Ross, Mary [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=98359cd1f66f46ec91d327e99a3c6909-Ross, Mary]; Gwinn, Maureen [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=4bdc5237a5c440a7b664518e23eb5647-Gwinn, Maureen]; Michael Slimak [Slimak.MichaelLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Troyer, Michael [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=847b0020dd0e457e85f994a1ad64b26d-Troyer, Michael]; Wright, Michael [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=0087b3fe163145869deead8b626fbfa3-Wright, Michael]; Keshava, Nagalakshmi [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=d125c2980ab348ec828ba8f513b95049-Keshava, Nagalakshmi]; Birchfield, Norman [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=c910f2fd28414e819b6afe6dda525e9f-Birchfield, Norman]; CN=Patricia Gillespie/OU=RTP/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Murphy, Patricia [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=4e02a7540f8042fda07eed1248addaf7-Murphy, Patricia]; Schlosser, Paul

[/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group
(FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=121cf759d94e4f08afde0ceb646e711b-Schlosser, Paul]; White, Paul
[/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group
(FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=4e179825823c44ebbb07a9704e1e5d16-White, Paul]; Peter Preuss
[Preuss.PeterLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Sams, Reeder [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group
(FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=7d5b479ccd894cea99ae55df20de6971-Sams, Reeder]; Jones, Samantha
[/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group
(FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=eac77fe3b20c4667b8c534c90c15a830-Jones, Samantha]; Barone, Stan
[/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group
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[/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group
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Susan [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group
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[/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group
(FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=00aac63cc995489188b8a449aaa18f5e-Rieth, Susan]; CN=Suzanne
Martos/OU=DC/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Berner, Ted [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group
(FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=f1949c9653024d3cb4aa4c2bd69c4fde-Berner, Ted]; Teneille Walker
[Walker.TeneilleLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Bateson, Thomas [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative
Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=29bfdde020bf4e93b431b9a72d9d230f-Bateson, Thomas]; Blessinger,
Todd [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group
(FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=f5240ca690c84f8fb20bac6fd7273fd5-Blessinger, Todd]; Long, Tom
[/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group
(FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=7526c52b77aa4516b9ac197536e5a6a0-Long, Tom]; Cogliano, Vincent
[/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group
(FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=51f2736376ac4d32bad2fe7cfef2886b-Cogliano, Vincent]; Weihsueh Chiu
[Chiu.WeihsuehLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]

Subject: NEWS UPDATES: Key Adviser Warns EPA To Improve Agency Science Or Face A 'Crisis' (Risk Policy Report)

Key Adviser Warns EPA To Improve Agency Science Or Face A 'Crisis'

Posted: July 1, 2011

A key EPA science adviser is warning that the agency must succeed in making its scientific research programs more transparent and sound in order to bring credibility back to agency science, or EPA will risk increased scrutiny from House Republicans and industry that could prompt a "crisis."

"You can't fail this time," Thomas Burke, associate dean of The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health who also chaired a recent National Academy of Sciences (NAS) panel on ways to improve EPA risk assessments, told EPA officials and other scientific advisers during a discussion on the agency's new chemical safety research program June 30.

"The sleeping giant is that EPA science is on the rocks . . . if you fail, you become irrelevant, and that is kind of a crisis," Burke told a joint meeting of EPA's Science Advisory Board and EPA's Board of Scientific Counselors (BOSC) charged with looking at the reorganization of the agency's research programs.

Burke, who chaired a recent NAS panel that recommended a host of steps for EPA to improve its risk assessment process, pointed in particular to the agency's risk assessment process, calling it EPA's "Achilles heel."

The recommendations that stemmed from Burke's NAS panel -- contained in a 2009 report titled *Science and Decisions: Advancing Risk Assessment* -- have taken on heightened significance over the past few months since another NAS panel urged EPA to quickly implement the recommendations in light of problems the panel found with the agency's assessment of formaldehyde.

While faulting the agency's draft formaldehyde assessment, the panel also devoted a chapter of their report to fixing its risk assessment process, including calls for EPA to develop a standardized

weight-of-evidence approached, establish clear guidelines for selecting studies to justify risk estimates and standardize the review process for assessments. Many of those recommendations were also contained in *Science and Decisions*.

In the wake of the NAS review of the formaldehyde assessment, EPA is under fire from industry and GOP lawmakers, who have also urged the agency to quickly implement the NAS' recommended approaches, not just in its chemical risk assessments but in EPA air programs (*see related story*). In light of this intense scrutiny, Burke urged officials from the Office of Research and Development at the SAB- BOSC meeting to tread carefully as it reorganizes its 21 research programs into six, and pay particular attention to how that system and other challenges levied by Paul Anastas, head of ORD, will play in to the IRIS program.

Among other things, the agency needs to better define sustainability, have metrics for which innovative idea the agency should pursue, develop a cross cutting transdisciplinary approach and provide funding to universities to better prepare students for the agency's future needs, Burke said. While some of those recommendations "sound kind of bureaucratic ... that revolution has to happen because the status quo is not working," Burke added. -- *Jenny Hopkinson*

Elizabeth Erwin
Communications Assistant
National Center for Environmental Assessment
Office of Research and Development
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office: (703) 347-0205
Fax: (703) 347-8699